Mackinac Co Planning Commission hosts Oil Pipeline company to answer questions about Straits pipeline

140205

Marcy Misner/Amy

(length 1:43 )

It was a record turnout at a planning commission in Mackinac County yesterday (Wednesday). More than 160 people from all over Michigan converged in St Ignace to hear Enbridge discuss the pipeline that runs beneath the Straits of Mackinac from the western UP downstate.

Marcy Misner was there and has this report

Company officials say they have stepped up proactive measures after a different pipeline in the Kalamazoo area leaked heavy crude, also known as tar sands, in 2010.

Meeting organizers say it was important to bring Enbridge in to answer questions about the #5 pipeline which crosses the Straits of Mackinac after they were given a report from the National Wildlife Federation. That report, titled Sunken Hazard, details terrifying possibilities and a number of oil spills that have already occurred elsewhere.

Enbridge officials say there are no plans to change from the light crude oil that’s currently running through the pipeline. They say there are no plans to carry tar sands through line #5 - Something many of those who gathered at the meeting feared.

Mackinac County Planning Commission Chairman Dean Reid says it’s easy to envision worst-case scenarios, but the company seems to have prepared for a leak as best they can.

**I think they have made good plans for any type of situation. They keep doing training. I think because of the Kalamazoo situation they’ve stepped up their training. They’ve done some improvements on the valves on either side. They’re looking at that would probably be even a worse disaster here at the Straits than it was in Kalamazoo.**

**Me: Are you reassured by what they said today?**

**Reid: Yes I am. I feel confident of what they brought to the table in discussing it. We covered a lot of things. One thing I like to see is the physical pipe is actually thicker in the Straits than it is on either side of the Straits. That tells me something right there. (:46)**

Meeting organizers set an hour and half for the meeting but there were still many unanswered questions when time ran out. That led to some shouting on the part of those in the crowd. Many felt the oil company sidestepped important concerns by refusing to answer any questions about the 6B pipeline.

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Environmental activists came out in force to a meeting in St. Ignace Wednesday that hosted Enbridge Energy, the company responsible for the largest and costliest inland oil spill in US history.

The Mackinac County Planning Commission invited Enbridge officials to the meeting to discuss measures being taken in the Straits, where pipeline #5 has carried light crude and natural gas liquids downstate since the 1950s. More than 160 people from all over Michigan gathered to take part.

The hope was that Enbridge could assure residents that the million gallons of oil spilled into a tributary of the Kalamazoo River in July 2010 could not happen in the Great Lakes.

Environmental groups have released reports blasting the condition of the 60-year-old pipeline under the Straits of Mackinac.

Enbridge spokeswoman Jackie Guthrie answered some of the scores of handwritten questions posed to the panel, including the oft-asked concern of a cleanup if a massive spill were to occur.

**You know, I’m going to be completely honest. We talked about how to address this question. And the bottom line is we can speculate all day on worst-case scenarios. What I can tell you and what we’ve tried to show you are all of the different safety mechanisms that we have in place to ensure that hopefully we don’t have any incidents but if we do, we work with our OSRO, and the coast Guard and all of these other places to ensure that we contain it as quickly as possible and return it to, return it back to the state in which it was. There’s more questions, you know, related to who’s going to pay for it and of course we do assume that responsibility, what materials do you have in the Straits. We talked about that we have stuff on both ends of the Straits – the boom – and our people that live and work here. I found this kind of interesting – Are you planning for the Madrid Earthquake. I can tell you that not necessarily Enbridge nor OSRO but I can tell you that from my past life that the Madrid Earthquake is practiced every year by the Dept of Defense. So that’s a Homeland security issue and they are dealing with it. (:46)**

Meeting organizers set an hour and half for the meeting. When time ran out many of those cards still had not been addressed. That led to some shouting on the part of those in the crowd. Many felt the oil company sidestepped important concerns by refusing to answer any questions about the 6B pipeline in Kalamazoo.

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Oil company officials spoke at the invitation of Mackinac County Planning Commission members in St. Ignace Wednesday. The members wanted an update on the condition of a pipeline that spans the 4-mile Straits of Mackinac.

Meeting organizers say it was important to bring Enbridge in to answer questions about the #5 pipeline which crosses the Straits of Mackinac after they were given a report from the National Wildlife Federation. That report, titled Sunken Hazard, details terrifying possibilities and a number of oil spills that have already occurred elsewhere.

Enbridge officials say they have stepped up safety measures in the Straits. They say there are no plans to carry tar sands through line #5 - Something many of those who gathered at the meeting feared.

Those 175 or so concerned residents drove in from around the state to hear what Enbridge had to say and to express concerns stemming from an oil spill in a tributary of the Kalamazoo River in July 2010. Over a million gallons of oil spilled and problems remain today from that disaster.

Folks had scores of questions for the oil company Wednesday but the meeting was set to end at 3:30. When the time limit expired, the meeting was abruptly called to an end, angering many of those whose questions went unanswered.

George Robson of Petoskey compared the events to the company which built the ill-fated Titanic.

**Well as I said before the reaction is it would be like having a White Star presentation and not taking any questions about the Titanic. Because people want to know what they’ve done in the past and how that’s going to be different in this situation and they wouldn’t accept any questions about that. So it was frustrating. Very frustrating. (:21)**

The elephant in the room Wednesday had to do with a massive oil spill in July 2010 in Marshall. It is the most costly and largest inland oil spill in US history. Enbridge officials said up-front they would not take questions about that leak of heavy crude oil, or tar sands, from pipeline 6B. This angered many in the crowd, who felt their concerns are not being addressed.

What Enbridge people would talk about included their efforts to step up leak detection and containment efforts in Pipeline #5 which carries light crude oil and natural gas liquids from Wisconsin to Sarnia. It spans the 4-mile-wide Straits of Mackinac.

Different agencies were on hand to explain what their emergency responses would be and the many emergency practice drills they’ve carried out.